

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY



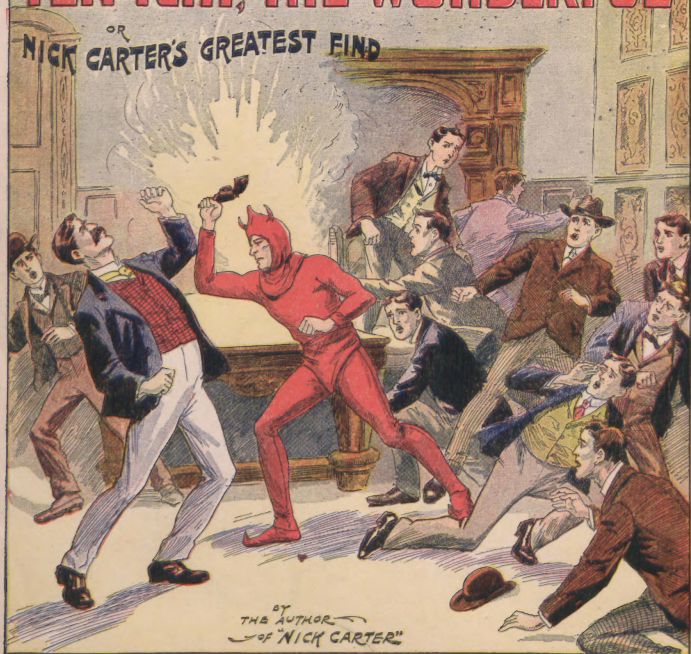
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No. 378.

Price, Five Cents.

TEN-ICHI, THE WONDERFUL

OR
NICK CARTER'S GREATEST FIND



BY
THE AUTHOR
OF "NICK CARTER"

Ten-ichi wrenched the revolver from the criminal's grasp, rapped him on the head with the butt, so that the
doughty captain sank in a heap to the floor.





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NEW YORK, March 26, 1904.

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TEN-ICHI, THE WONDERFUL;

OR,

Nick Carter's Greatest Find.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE BURGLARS OF PROTHERO PARK.

The residents of Prothero Park, an aristocratic suburb of the city, had become completely terrorized, and throughout the contiguous neighborhood including an area of ten miles or more, the conditions were little, if any, better.

One by one the most exclusive and thoroughly guarded homes had been entered and robbed of everything of value they contained, and although the most strenuous and effective efforts that could be inaugurated had been employed to abate the evil, not one of the robbers had been arrested, and the bold and seemingly fearless lawbreakers continued their depredations with impunity.

The local police authorities were helpless, dazed, and at their wits' end.

The detective bureau of the city had been appealed to, but without avail, for Prothero Park was outside the city limits, and therefore beyond the jurisdiction of the inspector.

After that a local vigilance committee was organized, but it accomplished nothing more substantial than to supply an armed guard which patrolled the streets at night, and thus, for a time, accomplished a discontinuance of the robberies; but as soon as a feeling of security began to be felt, the vigilance of the guard relaxed, and this was followed by two of the most daring robberies of the season, which took place, so the community averred, under the very noses of the guard.

In this extremity a meeting of the most prominent of the residents of the community was called, and Mr. Angus Cameron, the richest and most influential of them all, presided.

In calling the meeting to order, Mr. Cameron spoke as follows:

"The time has come," he said, "when we must adopt some decisive measures for our own protection. Our mothers, wives and daughters live in constant terror of what may happen next. It seems to make no difference how thoroughly guarded we are, or how completely armed we may be, the robbers find a way to enter our homes.

"We have appealed to the police force of the city; it cannot help us.

"We have engaged Pinkerton men and others to protect us, but the outrages continue.

"We have organized a vigilance committee, and that has proved inadequate.

"We carry arms, but we never have an opportunity to use them, because of the cunning of our enemies.

"In short, gentlemen, we have adopted every means that I can think of but one, to stop this epidemic of burglary, and now things have arrived at such a pass that you will all agree with me when I say that it must be stopped or we must make up our minds to abandon our homes and return to the city."

"What is the one means that we have not tried?" asked one of his neighbors. "You just now said there was one, but for the life of me I cannot think of any."

"Nick Carter," replied Mr. Cameron, briefly.

"By Jove!" exclaimed one man.

"That's so," said another.

"Never thought of him," remarked a third.

"Well, he is here in this house now," continued Mr. Cameron. "At least there is a person here who says he is Nick Carter, and inasmuch as he has brought the letter I wrote to the detective, I think we must accept him as being the man I sent for."

"Ask him to come in," came from several of those present, as with one voice, and Mr. Cameron, at whose house the meeting was held, threw open the door which communicated with an adjoining room.

"Now, Mr. Carter," he said, "if you will step this way we will be glad to discuss this matter with you."

For the benefit of the reader, it must be explained here that the person who entered the room where the

gentlemen of Prothero Park were waiting to receive him, was not Nick Carter at all. In reality, he was no other than Ten-Ichi, and his presence, in place of the great detective, may be explained by a note which Nick had left in his room for him that same morning.

It read as follows:

"This letter from Mr. Angus Cameron, of Prothero Park, explains itself. I want you to take it to the writer, represent yourself as Nick Carter, accept the case he offers you, and work it out to the end. I think you are capable of doing it unaided. If you should find that you need assistance, you will know what to do, but I am very busy on another matter just now and so don't want you to call upon me unless necessary. You may, in presenting yourself, adopt any disguise you please.—N. C."

When Ten-Ichi found the note he repaired at once to the make-up room, and when he presented himself at the house of Angus Cameron he looked and acted the part of a young and vigorous book agent, and in that capacity he had indeed called at several houses in the neighborhood before he at last applied at the Cameron residence.

"Why," exclaimed one of the gentlemen, when Ten-Ichi entered the room where they were seated, "you were at my house not half an hour ago, trying to sell me a set of books called the 'Heroes and Heroines of History.'"

"Sure I was, sir," replied Ten-Ichi, who had adopted a touch of the Irish-brogue, for the occasion. "I'll do that yet, sir, if you feel inclined to take them now, but by me soul, when I was at your house you acted as if you thought I might be one of the burghlar boys them silves, by the way you received me."

"That is exactly what I did fear. How are we to know that you are Nick Carter?"

"Maybe you can guess it; it's aisy."

"Have you any means of identifying yourself?"

Ten-Ichi turned to Mr. Cameron.

"Sure, sir," he said, "your friend thinks I want to cash a check."

"I have always supposed that Nick Carter was a les

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ive minutes in the next room I'll make you think me
as old as Methuselah. But that is neither here nor
here. You have sent for me to request my assistance
ron connection with the burglaries that have been taking
hplace in this neighborhood. I am here, in reply to
h
your request. The question is, do you want me to
nh
ake the case?"

"Right," replied Ten-Ichi. "And if you'll give me
give minutes in the next room I'll make you think me
as old as Methuselah. But that is neither here nor
here. You have sent for me to request my assistance
ron connection with the burglaries that have been taking
hplace in this neighborhood. I am here, in reply to
h
your request. The question is, do you want me to
nh
ake the case?"

"We certainly do; and as for your reward——"
w
"I'll send in my bill to you for services and expenses
es after the work is done. My terms are always the
is same. Now, sir, whose house was robbed last?"

"My own. This one?"

"When?"

"The night before last."

"Ah! But was the report in the papers, to the effect
that this was the third visitation of the burglars at
our house, correct?"

"Perfectly. It was their third visit here."

"Well, Mr. Cameron, if you don't mind, I'll just ask
you a few questions. When this house was robbed
he first time, what was stolen?"

"The robbers did not ascend to the second story on
that visit. They contented themselves with the silver-
ware in the dining rooms and some ornaments in the
parlor. About a thousand dollars' worth of plunder, I
think."

"They left no clew?"

"None that we were able to find."

"What about the second time?"

"They contented themselves with my sporting out-
t—my guns, fishing rods, reels, etc. I lost twenty-
ve hundred dollars' worth of such things on that vis-
itation."

"And they took nothing else?"

"No; not another thing. Six double-barreled shot-
guns, two rifles, a quantity of ammunition, my best
ods and my most expensive reels."

"It would seem, then, as if they came here expressly
or those things, eh?"

"Yes, it would. And also, as if they knew exactly
where and how to find them."

"Now, about the night before last?"

"They took thirty-five hundred dollars in cash, two
thousand dollars' worth of diamonds that belong to
Mrs. Cameron, and a few jewels of less value."

"The newspapers did not mention these losses your
name."

"No."

"Why?"

"This is the first time I have mentioned the amount
of my loss outside my own family."

"And the first time, also, that you have told what
it was you lost?"

"Yes."

"Where was the cash and the jewels?"

"In the safe in my library."

"Was the safe blown open?"

"No. It would appear that it was not locked. I
think when I closed it the last time I must have neg-
lected to turn the dial to lock it, for when I discov-
ered my loss yesterday morning the door of the safe
was swinging wide open."

"I see. It would follow, therefore, either that you
forgot to lock the safe before you retired for the night,
or that the person who robbed you knew the combina-
tion."

"No, sir; not that. Nobody in the world knew, or
knows now, that combination—that is, of course, no-
body but myself."

"Are you positive of that, Mr. Cameron?"

"Assuredly."

"Do you keep a written copy of the combination
anywhere, to refresh your memory in case you should
forget it?"

"No. I arranged the combination myself; I did not
make a memorandum of it and I have never told it
to a human being, so nobody could have known it but
myself; so, you see, I must have neglected to lock the
safe when I retired that night."

CHAPTER II.

THE SLICKEST BURGLARS IN THE WORLD.

"Will you tell me, Mr. Cameron, how you happened to have that amount of cash in your house at one time?"

"A mortgage I had held for some time was paid off during the afternoon of that day."

"Where were you when the money was paid to you?"

"In my library."

"The room where the safe is located?"

"Yes."

"Where is that room located?"

"On the second floor of the wing. It is my private library, not the general one, on this floor. I call it my library, to distinguish it from the library."

"I see. You use it as a sort of office?"

"No. It is my personal retiring room, where I go when I wish to be alone. I smoke there and think there. I do my writing there, and I sit there when I am especially interested in a book I happen to be reading; but I rarely entertain any person there."

"How does it happen that you received this particular person who paid off the mortgage, in that room?"

"Because he is a very old friend. We were boys together. We have always been intimate friends—chums, in fact. He is one of three or four persons who are ever admitted there, but he always has free access to me whenever he comes here."

"Who are the others?"

"My wife, my son, my daughter, this gentleman here on my right, Mr. Cooper, and Mr. Blaisdell are the only persons I receive in that room."

"Who is Mr. Blaisdell?"

"He is the gentleman who paid me the money, and"—turning toward the others—"I must request all who are present not to mention the circumstance that I held a mortgage on any of his property. In fact, Mr. Carter, Mr. Blaisdell is our minister."

"Ah! I see. Was he in the room when you placed the money in the safe?"

"Certainly."

"He saw you put it there?"

"Naturally."

"Who, beside Mr. Blaisdell and yourself, knew the money was there, or in fact that the money was your possession at all?"

"Nobody."

"You did not mention the fact that you had received it to anybody? not even to members of your own family?"

"I did not mention it at all."

"And you and the minister were alone together when you put the money in the safe?"

"We were."

"Now, do you think he told anybody about the transaction?"

"No, I do not; for the reason that he desired the entire transaction should remain a secret between us. The mortgage was on property in another county and I am sure that the fact that I had advanced money to him had never been told to anybody."

"Then, so far as you know, you and Mr. Blaisdell are the only persons who knew that the money was there?"

"Yes."

"You say you think you must have forgotten to lock the safe before retiring. As a matter of fact, do you think you did lock it?"

"I have never before neglected to turn the dial, and so lock it."

"If you were under oath, on the witness stand would you be willing to swear that you did not lock the safe before you retired, night before last?"

"No, I would not."

Ten-Ichi permitted his eyes to travel slowly from one to another of the occupants of the room until he had taken in each one there, and then:

"How many of you gentlemen have been robbed," he asked.

"There are five present besides myself," said Cameron, speaking for them, "and everyone of them has been visited by the burglars."

"When were you robbed, Mr. Cooper?" asked Ten-Ichi.

"Two weeks ago."

"What was stolen?"

"Almost everything the rascals could lay their hands on; decorative furnishings mostly, I think—rugs, sofa pillows, cushions, pictures on the walls, bric-a-brac, silverware, a case of wine and a case of whisky from the cellar, several boxes of cigars, a lot of pipes I have been collecting for years, and some smaller articles."

"And you, sir?" asked Ten-Ichi, addressing the man next to Cooper.

"I think, Mr. Carter, that your replies to these questions will be about the same from each of the gentlemen present," interrupted Cameron, "and if you will permit I believe I can give you a general answer which will cover all the cases in hand."

"Very well, sir."

"We have thought that the burglars have developed almost a regular system in the conduct of their robberies, not only in this community, but in the neighborhoods adjacent to Proflero Park. In other words, to those who have observed closely, it has appeared as if the robbers had made up their minds, before entering a house, exactly what they would take from it, and this view of the case seems to be borne out by the facts."

"Will you be a little more explicit?"

"Well, for example, when Cooper's house was visited, he was impressed, and so was I, with the idea that the thieves were after house furnishings and nothing else. There were other things of even greater value within reach of their hands that they might have taken at that time, had they been so disposed. In the case of the robbery of Mr. Small this view of the case was especially emphasized."

"How so?"

"Why, they carried away nothing but mattresses and bedding, pillows, blankets, and such things. Mr. Small's house was unoccupied at the time. His family was out of town and he was taking his meals and sleeping in the city; and they might have cleaned it out of everything it contained."

"Then, Mr. Cameron, your opinion is that the thieves have in each case decided what they wanted

before they entered the selected house, that they have in each case made straight for the selected object, and having obtained it, were satisfied?"

"Yes; that is it."

"If we carry out that hypothesis we must conclude then that they knew about the cash and jewels in the safe, in your private library."

"It would really seem so."

"I think we may pass from that point of the investigation for the present. I have noticed that you have not mentioned the burglar's methods of entering the houses."

"No, sir, I have not."

"It has been my experience in listening to people who related incidents connected with burglarized houses, that they inevitably describe the method by which the house was entered, before detailing any other part of the story. There has been a singular omission of facts of this kind here. Will you tell me why?"

"Because, sir, in each case, entrance has been made through a door or a window which some member of the family seems to have neglected to fasten before retiring."

"Ah! I see. In other words, it would appear almost as if there was a confederate inside the house."

"Precisely that; only that we have investigated, and we are each fully assured that such a hypothesis is impossible."

"Why?"

"We are each assured of the honesty of our servants. Where there has been one in the employ of anyone of us who has not been known to be worthy of confidence, that one has been sent away. It seems useless to go into the details of this aspect of the case, for in——"

Mr. Cameron paused, hesitated, bit his lips, and then continued:

"This is what I was about to say. Take the robbery that occurred in this house night before last."

"Very well. I was about to return to that."

"I have, or rather had, dismissed every servant who has not been in my employ for years, and those who

remain enjoy my confidence to the extent of members of the family."

"Well?"

"There is not one of them who has not been tried and trusted for years."

"Very good. Well?"

"Since these robberies have been going on there has not been a night when I have not personally inspected the doors and windows myself before retiring. Night before last I remember that I was especially particular in this respect, because I had that sum of money in the house."

"And also, for that reason, you were especially particular to lock your safe, were you not?"

"Yes; I think I was."

"In fact, Mr. Cameron, you are positive in your own mind that you did lock the safe that night."

"Yes, I am."

"What more were you about to say?"

"This: That although I personally inspected every door and window of the house before I went to bed, and remember particularly of putting up the chain and shooting the bolt of that door there"—and he pointed toward a side door that connected the room in which they were seated with a porch at the side of the house—"although I remember distinctly that I paid the same strict attention to that door, it was wide open when I came down in the morning, the bolts had been drawn, the chain removed and the lock turned. You see, sir, that such things could only have been done from the inside. Throughout this entire epidemic of robbery there has not been a house entered save by precisely the same methods. We are the victims of burglars who are the most expert in the world. When they commit their depredations, doors open for them as if by magic, dogs refuse to bark and so give warning, residents of houses are never disturbed in their slumbers and the utmost vigilance fails to reveal a sign of strangers in the neighborhood. The fact is, sir, we are frightened as well as puzzled, for there is something suggestive of the supernatural in these mysterious visitations."

CHAPTER III.

THE DUPLICATE KEYS.

"How many servants have you in your employ, Mr. Cameron?" asked Ten-Ichi.

"Three in the house, two in the stable."

"You say they have all been with you for some time, and that you thoroughly trust them?"

"I have reason to have perfect trust in all of them."

"And your family consists of yourself, your wife, your son and daughter, I believe. Are there others?"

"No. That is all."

"Where is your son now?"

"In his room, I believe."

"Won't you call him here? Young men usually have ideas which fathers do not credit with their full value, and I would like to talk with him. By the way, how old is he?"

"Twenty. Yes, I will call him if you wish it, but I would like to remind you that he has not been told of my loss in cash. He only knows that the burglars were here, that they succeeded in opening the safe and that his mother's jewels have been stolen."

"Then we, who are present in this room, are the only persons who are aware of the cash loss?"

"Yes."

"Very good. Now may I bind you and all to secrecy on that point? Good. And now, sir, will you call your son?"

Roger Cameron was as fine a specimen of the athletic young man as one would wish to see. He entered the room with that energetic dash which belongs exclusively to the confidence of healthy youth, and when Ten-Ichi was introduced as Nick Carter, and Roger was told that the great detective had been requested to make an effort to capture the burglars who were despoiling the neighborhood, the young man looked the contempt he felt for the personal appearance of the man whom he supposed to be the great detective.

The reader must remember that Ten-Ichi had eliminated from his appearance every outward evidence that he was a Japanese, and that his appearance could not have been up to the standard which a young man

of the proclivities of Roger Cameron would have expected, since he presented nothing more engaging than an itinerant book agent. Nevertheless, he was visibly pleased when Ten-Ichi singled him out for particular attention.

"I asked your father to call you in order to get your personal opinion of these robberies," said Ten-Ichi. "You have one, of course?"

"Certainly."

"Would you mind telling me what it is?"

"I think the robberies are the result of a conspiracy among the servants. I think they have a regularly organized gang among themselves, and that they plan their expeditions a long way ahead, so that they know beforehand just what they are to do. I think they have a leader who is exceedingly expert, who rules them with a rod of iron, and who is perhaps not himself a servant, and I think that they must have a headquarters somewhere not very far from here, where they hold their meetings, conceal their plunder, and plan what they are to do in the future."

"I perceive that you have given considerable thought to this subject," said Ten-Ichi.

"I have, of course."

"Have you a theory about their method of entering this house night before last?"

"Certainly."

"What is it?"

"I think that one of the servants admitted them."

"Which one?"

"I haven't gone so far as that yet."

"What do you think about the opening of the safe in your father's room?"

"That he failed to lock it. That he perhaps believed he locked it, but that in reality he did not."

Ten-Ichi turned to Mr. Cameron.

"Will you permit your son to go with me alone to the room where the safe is located?" he asked. "You have made the mistake of not questioning your son, and I find that he has some excellent and original ideas on this subject. If you and the others will wait here till we return, we won't be long."

"Certainly. Go ahead," said Mr. Cameron.

Roger Cameron was visibly pleased by the compliment paid him by the detective, and with no hesitation turned and led the way from the room.

The library, so called, in which the safe was located, was nothing more than a small room on the second floor in the wing of the house. The safe, about the size of an ordinary trunk when stood on end, occupied one corner of the room, and was closed.

Ten-Ichi crossed to it and endeavored to turn the handle, but discovered that it was locked.

"Too bad," he said. "I wish you would go back and ask your father to give you the combination. I would like to look inside the safe. He will have no objection to giving it to you now, I think."

Roger acquiesced and left the room immediately, but no sooner was he out of the room than Ten-Ichi turned the handle of the door and opened the safe without difficulty. It had not been locked at all. Ten-Ichi had only pretended that it was.

A hasty survey of the interior developed to Ten-Ichi's searching eyes, merely some bundles of papers systematically arranged inside, and also a bunch of four small keys that dangled from one of the inside drawers.

Hastily removing these, after locking the drawer from which they were pendant, Ten-Ichi dropped the keys in his pocket and then quickly but quietly closed the door of the safe again and turned the dial so that it was locked.

Then he crossed to the window and stood looking out into the gathering darkness until Roger Cameron returned.

As Ten-Ichi had expected, Roger's father returned with him.

"The safe is not locked," he said, upon entering the room.

Without waiting for a reply he went immediately to the safe and tried to open it, but of course it would not yield to his touch.

"That is very strange," he remarked. "I was here not half an hour ago, and I am sure I did not lock the safe. It has not been locked since the robbery."

"But it really is locked now," said Ten-Ichi.

"So it seems. However, I am positive that I did not lock it."

"Then who did?"

"That I cannot say. Have you been in this room since I left it, Roger?"

"Yes, sir. I was here when you called me."

"Did you touch the dial of the safe?"

"Not consciously, sir. I think, however, that I did brush against it. It is possible that it might have been turned in that way sufficiently to lock it."

"Yes," assented his father. "That must be the explanation. What were you doing here, my son?"

"I simply came in search of you, sir."

"Then you were here only a moment?"

With a sigh of relief, doubtless because of the easy and natural explanation of the mystery, Roger Cameron's father drew a chair near to the safe and began to turn the dial until finally the tumblers fell into place and he pulled the door open.

For a moment he stared inside the safe, and then, in a voice that trembled with emotion, he exclaimed:

"This is most astounding!"

"What surprises you?" asked Ten-Ichi, calmly.

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all. For a moment I was under the impression that I had left my keys hanging in that drawer, but now I remember that I—er—dropped them in the pocket of my jacket. Yes, I remember it now perfectly."

Ten-Ichi smiled.

He had been a close observer of all that was taking place while Mr. Cameron was working the combination of the safe, and there were several apparently insignificant details of the scene that had not escaped his attention.

He believed, also, that he understood why Mr. Cameron had chosen to lie about the keys, for that he had deliberately lied about them could not be denied; and yet, when he rose from the chair in front of the safe, he crossed the room, and taking a smoking jacket from a chair where it had been carelessly thrown, drew from one of the side pockets a bunch of keys that were exactly like those which Ten-Ichi had purloined.

"Yes, here they are," he said, apparently relieved.

But there was one other incident that had attracted the attention of the young detective when Mr. Cameron mentioned the keys. It was nothing more than a quick and almost imperceptible start on the part of Roger, and a hasty motion made by one of his hands toward a pocket in his trousers—a motion that was suspended before it was half consummated; but it was full of significance, for all that.

Ten-Ichi, who permitted nothing to escape him, saw in that arrested motion, together with the incident of the mislaid keys, an explanation of a very puzzling circumstance, and the thought which flashed through his mind on the instant was this:

"All keys of the small thin pattern are made in duplicate. When a man purchases a safe, two keys to each drawer within, are given to him; one of these he puts carefully away for use in case the other is lost, and as such keys are rarely lost, the duplicate is usually forgotten. Now here is the point:

"Roger Cameron has found his father's duplicate keys, and had them in his possession until the moment when his father called him while he was in this room, at this safe. In his haste to reply to his father's summons, he forgot the keys, and he did not remember that he had done so until his father believed he missed his own and so called attention to the fact.

"Roger Cameron was unquestionably at this safe when his father called him, and he believes that he inadvertently turned the dial and locked it.

"He has been at the safe twice this evening, and the keys have been hanging in the drawer since he was there the first time. His father saw them there and believed they were his own, which accounts for his thinking they had disappeared when he first opened the safe.

"What was there in connection with this safe that could have induced young Cameron to go to it twice this evening, when it is supposed to be empty of all valuable material? Why did he use his duplicate keys on the drawers, I wonder? Was it to take something from them, or to replace something that had been taken? And what will the young man do now when he discovers that his keys are lost?"

"His ready theory about the robberies as delivered downstairs was altogether too glib. He had rehearsed it too thoroughly and learned it too well.

"With all your bright looks, Roger Cameron, you are a degenerate, and if you are not the commander-in-chief of this gang of robbers, you are a member of it."

Ten-Ichi had watched Mr. Cameron narrowly while he worked the combination of the safe, and in doing so had discovered that it was not a difficult matter to read the combination over his shoulder while he was engaged in making it. Roger might have done it easily a hundred times without his father once having a suspicion of the fact.

His ownership of the duplicate keys now reposing in the pocket of Ten-Ichi, proved that he knew the combination, and with that much established it was a simple matter to explain the other mysteries connected with the robbery.

But it was not such an easy matter to prove it.

Ten-Ichi was already satisfied that he could explain the entire series of burglaries.

It was plain to him that the sons of the very men who had been robbed were the robbers. It was also clear that they had a regularly organized gang, and that having become bolder by reason of their successes, they had branched out and were now extending their activities in every direction.

"There is only one thing for me to do," was Ten-Ichi's thought, "and that is to become a member of their organization. It is the only way in which the proof can be brought home to their fathers, and it is the only way by which these youngsters can be saved from careers of crime. It is worth the time and I will do it."

CHAPTER IV.

PICKING UP THE SCENT.

It was after ten o'clock in the evening when Ten-Ichi took leave of his host; and when he did so, Roger, the son, followed them out upon the wide veranda to bid him good-by, with the ostensible purpose of indicating to him the shortest route to the station, and

while they were standing together one of those little things which often determine important events happened.

Another young man, of about the same age as Roger, was passing the gate, and while he saluted them after the manner of neighbors generally, he also uttered a short whistle, which, while it might have passed unnoticed to most persons, seemed to be weighted with peculiar significance for Roger Cameron, for he threw back his head with a quick motion which suggested defiance more than anything else, whistled the same peculiar cadence in reply, and then, with a sudden assumption of a courtesy that he had not before extended, he offered to accompany the man whom he supposed to be Nick Carter to the station.

"Wait," he exclaimed. "I will get my hat and go with you to the railway."

Without pausing for a reply, he darted into the house, presently returning equipped for the street, and in another moment Ten-Ichi was walking beside him toward the station.

The young man with whom the signal had been exchanged was presently overtaken, as Ten-Ichi expected he would be. He had loitered along the street only a short distance ahead of them, and it was plain to the young detective that he had expected to be followed.

The signal, then, as Ten-Ichi understood it, had meant that he had something to say to Roger and that he wished to see him without delay.

When Ten-Ichi discovered that an introduction was inevitable, he had a sudden inspiration, which was to make Roger think that he was anxious to keep his identity a secret. Such an idea he knew would give zest to the meeting of the boys and render it more than ever necessary that they should see and converse with each other secretly.

"Introduce me by any name you please," said Ten-Ichi, quickly and in a low tone, "but do not mention the fact that I am a detective. It is always just as well to keep such matters quiet, you know. The fewer the people in this neighborhood who are made aware of the fact that Nick Carter's services have been engaged, the better."

When they overtook Roger's friend, the latter was introduced to Ten-Ichi as Mr. Hugh Danforth.

Watching the two narrowly while they continued their walk toward the station, it soon became evident to Ten-Ichi that they were exchanging signals, as if each had important information which he wished to impart to the other as soon as opportunity could offer, and the young detective decided that such an opportunity should be vouchsafed them without delay; and, moreover, if it were possible, that he should himself be a witness to that interview.

The train was already pulling in at the station when they arrived, and Ten-Ichi, having announced that he was already provided with a ticket, shook hands cordially with his companions and leaped upon the platform of the smoking car before the train came to a stop.

In that way he was carried the entire length of the station before the train came to a halt, and so was quickly separated from them.

He did not, however, enter the smoking car; but turned into the one behind it, and walking rapidly through that and the next one to it, was able to see that neither of the boys gave any further attention to him. Evidently it did not occur to either of them that the detective had no idea whatever of remaining on the train until it landed him in the City of New York.

In point of fact, it had not once been the intention of Ten-Ichi to return to the city that night. He had undertaken the pilgrimage to Prothero Park, prepared to remain there until the mystery surrounding the burglaries was solved, and he had thoroughly provided himself with the wherewithal to meet any emergency that might arise, as well as to perform such tricks of jugglery and disguise as he might need to do before his return.

As soon as he noticed that the boys were already turning away from the station, evidently satisfied that the detective was disposed of for the night, he dropped quietly and quickly from the train, on the opposite side to them, ran along that side to the rear, and so darted out upon the street and across to the opposite side of it, before they left the station platform.

A picket fence with a dense hedge of box growing luxuriantly behind it bordered the walk opposite the station, and in an instant Ten-Ichi concealed himself behind it.

Then, with a quickness of motion that would have done credit to Nick Carter himself, he made rapid alterations in his appearance.

The soft Fedora hat he had worn was folded and concealed in one of his many pockets. The coat and waistcoat, made double for just such uses, were taken off, turned inside out and donned again. The trousers were subjected to the same operation. A wig of unkempt black hair took the place of the one he had worn as the book agent, and a rough, much-used cap of the corduroy type was tossed upon the grass beside him preparatory to pulling it down over his eyes when he should have altered the complexion of his face to his satisfaction.

He was not long in performing that duty, and then, having smeared his shoes plentifully with mud, adding a touch of it here and there to his face, shirt front and cuffs, and having disposed of his collar and tie and put on the cap, he stepped forth from his place of concealment, a perfect representation of a young Savoyard workman. In other words, he looked the young Italian laborer to perfection.

All these changes occupied such a short space of time that they were completed almost as soon as the boys came out upon the street from the station, and when he fell in behind them they were not more than a hundred feet in advance of him, or just far enough so that he could stroll along in their wake without attracting attention to the fact that they were followed.

But he knew that he could not follow them any considerable distance without being observed, for the reason that the hour was already ten o'clock in the evening, and in that suburban neighborhood the street was almost deserted, and indeed in many of the residences the lights had already been extinguished for the night.

Two things, however, upon which Ten-Ichi rather banked for assistance in what he desired to do were destined to help him.

He was convinced that Roger Cameron had made

the courtesy of accompanying him to the train merely an excuse to get out of the house long enough to answer in person the signal whistle of his friend, and that being the case, he would not dare to remain out much longer than the time that would be required for him to walk to the station and return. If that were true, it was also more than likely that Hugh Danforth had made an errand to the train an excuse for his own temporary absence from his home.

Again, if it were true, as Ten-Ichi had already decided it was, that these boys were members of the gang of burglars that had terrorized the neighborhood, they each had methods for leaving their own houses in the stillness of the night, after the members of their respective families were sleeping.

And yet again, presuming the foregoing hypotheses to be correct, it was natural that they would have many times more confidences to exchange with each other anent the coming of the great Nick Carter upon the scene than they could discuss in the short time consumed in walking from the railway station to their homes.

Hence—and here was the point—it would become of vast importance to them that they should meet again that same night, and more than that, that they should call to that meeting the most important and most influential members of their organization.

In other words, Ten-Ichi believed that there would be a hasty and a special meeting called for that very night, and through that means the young detective was certain to obtain several important bits of information.

How wisely Ten-Ichi conjectured we will presently discover.

Keeping a safe distance behind them, he pursued them up the street, feeling assured that they would bid each other good-night at Cameron's gate as if they had no expectation of meeting again that night; and this they did, exactly as he had expected.

Roger Cameron entered his home and closed the door, and for an instant Ten-Ichi hesitated between watching the Cameron house until he reappeared, or following young Danforth.

He decided, however, on the latter course, and hav-

ing traversed two more squares and turned down a side street, the youth presently entered a less pretentious house.

Then, as Ten-Ichi looked around him in the half light, he decided that he could not do better than to wait for the reappearance of Hugh Danforth, and to shadow him to the meeting place of the young outlaws.

CHAPTER V.

THE BLACK SPECTER OF PROTHERO PARK.

If it had been the privilege of the young detective to have selected a spot in which to conceal himself while he watched and waited, he could not have discovered one that was better adapted to his uses than the grounds which surrounded the cottage house where Hugh Danforth lived.

The house itself was a small affair, and doubtless did not contain more than six rooms, consisting of one regular story with a mansard roof. But the grounds were extensive, comprising at least two acres of land.

Everywhere, through the grounds, were flower beds, shrubberies, lilac bushes, etc., so that a better place in which to hide and from which to watch could not have been found.

All the same, it is not an easy matter for one person to watch the four sides of a house at once, and Ten-Ichi, of course, had no means of deciding from which side Hugh Danforth would reappear.

For that intelligence he had to rely solely upon his own judgment, and this is how he decided the point.

There was only one lighted room in the house when young Danforth entered it, and that Ten-Ichi decided was the general sitting room, in which the young man's mother was doubtless seated, awaiting his return.

Naturally, the boy would make no effort to leave the house again before midnight, and it occurred to Ten-Ichi to wonder how the others, whose presence was desired at the meeting, were to be notified.

The Jap, after first taking the precaution to assure himself that he was not observed, crept beneath the window where the light shone forth, and was fortunate

enough to discover that a slight misfit in the draping of the curtain that shaded it afforded him an opportunity to observe the interior of the room.

When he peered through the opening it was to discover that there were three persons in the room—a man and a woman, evidently the father and mother of the boy, and Hugh himself.

Hugh was at that moment engaged in lighting a lamp, for the house seemed not to be provided with gas, and Ten-Ichi saw him bid his parents good-night and leave the room, closing the door behind him.

It was an easy matter then for the young detective to follow the course of the light through the house, up the stairs and into a room on the second floor in the mansard roof, where it remained, and which was therefore where Hugh slept.

Feeling certain that the young man would make no effort to leave the house before his father and mother were sleeping, Ten-Ichi returned to the opposite side of the house where the parents were, for he had decided that as soon as they had gone to their room he would enter the house himself.

He had not long to wait, for within a few moments of the time he took up his position the light was carried from the room up the stairs and deposited in the room directly over it and almost opposite the one occupied by their son.

The phosphorescent dial of Ten-Ichi's watch showed him that it was already eleven o'clock, and as he knew that at least an hour must elapse before he could make a move, he settled himself comfortably in the depth of the lilacs.

Presently the light in the room where the parents slept was extinguished, but Ten-Ichi could see by the reflection against the trees that one was still burning in the room to which the son had repaired; but even while he looked that went out also.

Ten-Ichi waited thirty minutes, and then he did a most remarkable thing. Even Nick Carter, had he been an observer of the scene, would have been puzzled to explain it, for it must be remembered that the young assistant was a Japanese, that he had been trained in his own country, where things are accom-

plished by different methods than those adopted anywhere else in the world, and that, moreover, the lad was decidedly original himself in everything he undertook.

This is what he did.

He deliberately divested himself of his outer clothing, depositing each garment, as he removed it, in such a position among the bushes as would enable him to put it on his person again in the least possible time.

But it was his appearance, after he had laid them all aside, that presented the surprising part of the scene, for he was arrayed entirely in a solid, black, tight-fitting garment that covered him from head to feet.

From the pockets of the coat he had discarded he procured a hood and a pair of gloves of the same hue, and, having adjusted these to his satisfaction, he seemed entirely to have disappeared, as if the darkness had swallowed him.

Thus costumed, Ten-Ichi felt that he could defy the world to catch him. If he were in the dark, he could not be seen, and if the darkness were not sufficiently dense to absorb him, there was nothing that he could not do in the shape of running, leaping or dodging, and he was an expert in all of these accomplishments.

Two more things he did before he left the shelter of the lilacs. One was to conceal several small pads of thin material beneath the black garment he wore, and if there had been sufficient light and his features had not been concealed by the black hood, a mischievous smile might have been seen on his face as he did so, for truth to tell, they were nothing less than accessories to his present costume, but were made of material so thin that they occupied no more room about his person, when folded, than so much tissue paper would have done. Nevertheless, that they were important adjuncts to his operations for the next few hours we shall presently see.

The other thing he did, was to select the small pick-lock which Nick Carter had instructed him how to use, and with it in his hand, to glide rapidly toward the porch which sheltered the front door of the house.

The small, black figure moved so quickly and as silently as a shadow, and as invisibly.

It is doubtful if a person standing at the gateway, ten feet from the little stoop, and watching for the appearance of a person, could have discovered him, so completely did his figure blend with the surrounding darkness of the night.

Having gained the stoop, he worked silently and nimbly for a moment upon the door, and then he glided back again to the bushes. The pick-lock was of metal and would gleam through the darkness if a ray of light could fall upon it, and hence Ten-Ichi could not afford to take it into the house with him. But it had already done its work, and he had no more use for it at present.

Having replaced it in a pocket of the garments he had discarded, he returned to the porch again.

Let it be remembered that the young detective was absolutely 'weaponless.

Having decided, while he waited there among the dark bushes, upon the course he would pursue for the balance of the night, he adopted it without an instant's hesitation; and the most important factor connected with the character he intended to assume, consisted in the fact that he should carry absolutely nothing in his pockets, and that nothing should be strapped to his body to impede his movements.

The little pads of folded, tissue-like material, intended for use later during the night, if everything would take place as he believed it would, occupied no more room than so many veils, such as women wear. The door, already unlocked with the aid of the little instrument named, yielded readily to his touch, and he slipped inside and closed it behind him without a sound.

For a moment after that he waited, listening intently, but there was not a sound within the house to note that his entrance had attracted attention, and he crept out for the balustrade and quickly and silently descended the stairs to the upper floor.

The plan of the interior of the house was so thoroughly in his mind, deliberated upon during his escape from the outside, that he had no difficulty in finding his way at once to the door of Hugh's room.

As he had expected, not a ray of light emanated from it, but as he listened, he could hear a faint tapping sound—so faint, indeed, that only his quickened senses could detect it; and then the young Jap smiled broadly beneath the black hood he wore over his head and face, for he recognized instantly what caused it.

The sound was made by the relay portion of a telegraphic instrument, and, although Ten-Ichi listened for the letters, and could decipher each one as it was made upon the instrument, they refused to fit together into words, and he knew that the operator was employing a cipher which was not intended for uninterested parties' ears.

In a flash, however, it came to him how the members of the youthful gang of burglars communicated with one another; for what was more simple than that they should have had erected a telegraph wire from house to house while they were boys, and to have used it for years between themselves as a mere plaything, only at last to turn it to this other and infamous use?

By shutting off the sounder so that it would not work, and making use only of the relay, which made a sound so faint that it could not be heard beyond the door of a room in which it was employed, save by a person so interested in hearing as Ten-Ichi was, it became a simple matter for the young men to exchange signals.

"What a pity it is that I do not understand their cipher," thought Ten-Ichi, "for then I could become as well posted as these others chaps. However, I will know it before the night is over. My young friend, Hugh, is notifying his compatriots to leave their homes and attend an important meeting of the gang to be held at their headquarters this night. That is sure. What could be more important to them than the presence of Nick Carter in their midst? Gee! I wonder how this particular captain, or lieutenant, or whatever he is, would feel if he knew that little Ten-Ichi, whom he believes to be Nick Carter, were listening at his door this very moment? I wonder if he locked this door. Probably not."

Ten-Ichi turned the knob, very slowly; so slowly that even if there had been the possibility of a grating

sound within the mechanism of the door, it would have found no opportunity for expression.

Then, with the same deliberate care he pushed the door open, accomplishing only the merest fraction of an inch at a time, but, nevertheless, forcing it ajar, after which he stepped across the threshold and closed it as silently as he had opened it.

All this was accomplished without attracting the attention of the young man who was absorbed in sending and receiving messages over the wire, and without his suspecting that there was another person than himself in the room where he was at work.

CHAPTER VI.

HUGH DANFORTH IS SHADOW HAUNTED.

It must be remembered that the room was in utter darkness.

Hugh Danforth, having decided to leave his home again that night, had not removed his clothing, and was only awaiting the time when he would feel assured that his father and mother were sleeping, when he would slip silently from the house and hurry to the meeting place of his friends and associates.

Also, in order better to understand the incidents which took place there before he did go out, the reader must remember the costume of Ten-Ichi.

Within that room from which all light had been excluded, covered entirely by black, as he was, he could glide from place to place with the utmost ease, in perfect silence, and without the slightest danger of being discovered, so long as he did not once permit himself to pass between Hugh Danforth and the window; for, notwithstanding the heavy foliage without, a faint glimmer of starlight did sift through it.

On the other hand, by keeping himself in the background and thus placing young Danforth between him and what little light there was at the window, he was enabled to see with some degree of distinctness, without himself being seen; therefore, while he paused near the door after he had closed it, he could quite plainly discern the figure of Danforth, seated at a table near

the window, and engaged in manipulating the telegraphic key.

For several moments the young man worked on in silence, save for the faint clicking of the instrument, and then, as if his occupation was completed, he leaned back in his chair, and following the example of many other young men when they find themselves utterly alone and in the dark, began to think aloud—a practice commonly described by the term, "talking to one's self."

"I've notified everybody but Cooney," he soliloquized, "and Roger said he would find a way to get word to him, so I guess we'll have a full attendance.

I shouldn't wonder if the boys might decide to make another raid to-night, before daylight. It may be the last chance we will have for a time, for with Nick Carter in the field, we will have to lay low till the present excitement blows over. . . . There's Dr. Blaisdell's house, and Senator Manners that we haven't visited yet. . . . We've got all the plans laid for both of those places, and I shouldn't wonder if we could do them both in one night. . . . Wouldn't it be a great joke on Nick Carter to be told by that stupid committee that two houses were robbed in one night, and the very night he was here, too? I guess he'd wish he hadn't been led to the train and put aboard and sent to New York as deftly as Roger and I did that little trick for him. . . . I guess he'll find, when he is up against this outfit, that we are as clever as he is. . . . This is no ordinary set of thieves that you are tackling, Nick Carter. You've got brains pitted against you this time. . . . There's another thing, too: If Nick Carter does get gay and think he can down The Gentleman Raiders, he'll find that he is up against the most perfect organization in the United States, and that our captain is not a man to be trifled with. Capt. Bob is a man who won't stand any fooling, and if that detective only knew that our chief is a man who can call hundreds to his assistance in a mighty short space of time, he'd think twice before he came here to this lonely spot to tackle us."

By all of which it will be seen that the combination of youthful outlaws was not deficient in

esteem, at least; and that they were evidently captained by a personage who was familiar with the trade in which he was educating them.

Ten-Ichi thought he could understand that reference to a certain Capt. Bob.

It meant merely that these youths had been led into their present occupation by the arguments and wiles of a regular crook, who while he captained them and forced them to do the dangerous work for him, while he directed them to rob the houses of their own parents and to bring the swag to him, was doubtless content to remain in the background, and so to reap the profits of their burglaries, while he ran no risks of detection himself.

During the soliloquy, Hugh Danforth remained seated in the chair near the telegraphic instrument, and after he had ceased speaking, he remained silent for some time; but at last, with the muttered remark that he wondered what the time might be, he pulled his watch from his pocket and cautiously struck a match.

"Just midnight," he mused aloud, as the flame of the match flared up, and then, as if a door had suddenly opened behind him, thus causing a draft, was extinguished before he had a chance to blow it out.

Ten-Ichi had leaned forward over his shoulder and quietly blown out the flame of the match as soon as it was lighted.

"That's funny," said Hugh, speaking to himself, of course. "I wonder if I left that door open."

He left his seat and crossed the room, only to find that the door was closed. Satisfied on that point, he returned to his chair near the window, and after a moment of preparation, he struck a second match.

Again it was blown out almost as soon as it was lighted, but again there was not the slightest apparent reason for the incident.

"Must be a draft here from somewhere," muttered Hugh; but this time he did not leave his chair.

"It's midnight anyhow," he continued, after a pause. "I might as well get out and go along to the rendezvous. There is no use in waiting here. The old folks are sound asleep by this time, sure. However, I might just as well make certain."

He moved his chair back from the table and proceeded to remove his shoes.

Having accomplished that, and placed them on the floor beside the table where he was seated, he tiptoed to the door, opened it, and passed out into the hall.

If Ten-Ichi had one fault in the world, it was his fondness for joking, and he saw in the episode of the shoes an opportunity to indulge himself in one, so he glided forward, secured the shoes, and then, as silently as a shadow, followed Hugh into the hall.

He knew perfectly well what the young man intended to do. He knew that he would tiptoe to the door of the room where his father and mother slept, and listen there until satisfied that they were slumbering, after which he would not consider it important to wait longer in the house.

But Ten-Ichi was resolved to give the youth something to think about before he left the house to attend the meeting of The Gentlemen Raiders, and so he followed him closely, and in that same shadow-like silence that emitted no sound.

Hugh Danforth wore a white collar and cuffs, and therefore Ten-Ichi could follow every move he made with exactness, for there is always light enough, even in what we suppose to be inky darkness, to reflect upon anything that is white.

The young man approached the door of his parents' sleeping room with great caution, and then, dropping upon one knee, he pressed his ear against the threshold and listened.

It was then that Ten-Ichi glided forward.

Hugh was still upon one knee listening, when directly over his head, against the panel of the door, there sounded a distant rapping, loud enough to awaken the inmates of the room.

It was probably the most astonishing thing that had ever occurred in the experience of Hugh Danforth.

For one instant he remained motionless, as if paralyzed by the sound, and then, as there came a sleepy "Who is there? Is that you, Hughey? What is the matter?" from beyond the door, he scrambled to his feet and answered:

"Nothing," he said, but his teeth chattered in spite

of him, when he spoke. "I thought I heard you call. I had been downstairs to get a glass of water."

"Is anything the matter, Hughey?" asked the voice of his mother.

"No. Nothing, mother. Good-night," he replied.

He left the door then and hastened back to his own room without knowing, of course, that the shadow had preceded him, but he did not dare to strike a light, lest his father should follow him there to ascertain the real cause of the disturbance.

Instead, he drew back the coverings of the bed and piled into it with all his clothes on, so that in case he was followed, his father would not know that he had not undressed.

But there was no sound of pursuit, and after remaining there until he was satisfied that his parents were satisfied, he climbed out again and crossed the room to the chair near the telegraph instrument and the window, where he had taken off his shoes.

"What in thunder could have made that noise?" he asked himself aloud. "It sounded right over my head, but, of course, it wasn't. It must have been something outside the house."

Thus soliloquizing, he leaned forward and reached out for his shoes.

They were not where he expected to find them, and he passed his hand over the floor in a circle all around the spot where he was sitting, but there was not a sign of his shoes anywhere.

"That's funny," he muttered. "I could have sworn that I left them right here."

Again he made a thorough search, only again to be disappointed.

"I wonder if I carried them out in the hall with me?" he mused. "I think I'll go and see. I might have kept them in my hand until I listened at father's door, and then, because I was rattled, left them there. I'll find out, anyhow."

He crossed the room to the door and sought to open it, only to find that it resisted his efforts, and, upon investigation, to discover that the bolt on the inside had been moved into place.

"I'll swear that I did not bolt that door!" he mut-

tered. "I wonder what in blazes is the matter with me to-night, anyhow!"

He pushed back the bolt as silently as possible and went out to search for his shoes.

Of course he did not find them, and presently he returned to his room again and was about to seat himself once more in his accustomed chair, when by the faint light that sifted in at the window, he discovered his shoes.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed; and well he might, for his shoes were reposing peacefully, directly on the top of his telegraphic instruments.

"Who would have thought that I would be fool enough to put them there!" he said, aloud. "By thunder! I begin to think that I am bewitched. I'll put them on and get out of this."

He crossed one leg over the other and began to loosen the laces of one of the shoes, preparatory to drawing it on his foot, but he stopped suddenly and shivered as with a sudden attack of ague.

The laces of both shoes had been tied into several hard knots so that it was impossible for him to undo them; and that was a thing which he felt sure he had not done himself.

Hugh Danforth was beginning to be frightened.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHADOW MYSTERY DEEPENS.

"What in the world is the matter with me?" muttered the boy, sitting bolt upright in his chair and trembling like a leaf in a storm. "Am I so nervous to-night, that I do these strange things without knowing that I do them? One thing is sure, I'll get out of the house without more delay."

He replaced the shoes on the floor, crossed the room to a closet, secured another pair and was about to adjust them to his feet, when he heard the latch of his door click and he could feel rather than see that it swung open; and immediately he heard a shrill whisper, seemingly from the hallway.

"Hughey! Come here, quick!" said the whisper.

Startled, the boy leaped to his feet and darted across the room.

He knew that somebody had called him, but whether it was his father or his mother, he could not determine.

In his anxiety, he forgot for the instant that he was dressed and that he did not wish that either of his parents should see him so; but, nevertheless, when he reached the door, there was nobody there, and while he stood, peering into the darkness in the vain effort to discover the source of the alarm, he was startled into a sudden and only half suppressed exclamation of pain and alarm, by feeling the sharp prick of a pin in one of his legs.

He leaped back into the room with a suddenness that almost brought him into collision with his tormentor, and in doing so, dropped the shoes he had carried in his hand so that they clattered to the floor with considerable noise.

Realizing that the sound might have disturbed his father, he paused, breathlessly, and listened, but hearing no disturbance from the direction of the room where his parents were sleeping, he stooped to regain possession of his shoes.

They were not there, where he had dropped them!

"Good heavens!" he muttered, and then, in dismay and with a sensation that bordered on terror, he swept the floor with his hands, in a huge circle.

"This is terrible!" he whispered to himself, while beads of perspiration began to ooze from the tightened skin on his forehead.

"Am I going mad?" he asked himself, in dismay, "or is this house haunted by the Evil One? I'll light the lamp for a minute and see if that will set things right."

The lamp had stood on a table near the second window of the room, but when Hugh reached it and stretched out his hand for the lamp to remove the chimney, it had disappeared. There was no lamp there.

"I put it on that table," he muttered. "I'll swear I put it there!"

Again he searched for it, but it was nowhere to be seen. Evidently it had taken to itself wings and flown away.

"This is simply awful!" breathed Hugh, trembling with fear.

Then, with a mighty effort, he pulled himself together, straightened himself, threw back his shoulders, and in a whisper that penetrated the room, he announced:

"Spirit or devil, whoever you are who is here, you shall not frighten me," he said. "You haven't done anything to hurt me yet, and until you do, I won't show the white feather. I'd be a fine fellow to be third chief of The Gentlemen Raiders if I could be frightened by a few things I don't understand, wouldn't I?"

He crossed back to the table where the telegraph instruments were, and again discovered more shoes resting upon them.

It was the second pair—the pair that he had dropped near the door, and this time, instead of the laces being wrought into hard knots, they had been entirely removed.

"I wonder if there were laces in these shoes when I took them from the closet?" he asked himself. "I remember that they were broken and had been tied together. Probably mother has removed them. Well, I haven't got any more shoes, so I'll have to put these on without lacing them, or stop to untie the knots in the others. I wonder what time it is, anyway."

Again he pulled his watch from his pocket.

It was attached to a fob, and he held it in one hand while with the other he searched in a second pocket for a match; but while he held it thus, the watch was snatched from one hand and the match from the other.

The two articles were taken from his hands almost at the same instant.

There was not a sound that he could hear when it was done, and he was not conscious of contact with anything whatever.

The articles had simply seemed to fly out of his grasp of their own volition.

The incident was altogether too much for the nerves of Hugh Danforth to bear.

He uttered a low, gurgling cry that could not have penetrated beyond the door of his room, leaped to his feet, and with one bound reached the window.

In an instant he threw up the sash, balanced himself for a moment on the sill, and then leaped lightly out into the darkness in his stocking feet.

It was only a short distance to the ground, and he alighted without injury.

There he paused, and straightening himself, looked up at the window and shook his fist at it with impotent rage.

If he could have seen through it into the darkness beyond, and have discovered the black shadow that stood there watching him, and shaking with laughter, his rage would doubtless have been tenfold greater.

As it was, he did not hurry away.

Out from the black darkness of the room where so many mysterious things had happened, into the half light of the starry, but moonless night, his courage returned to him, and he wondered why he had fled so precipitately.

Ten-Ichi, in the meantime, perceiving that Hugh did not immediately seek to escape from the vicinity of the house, was not idle.

With deft fingers, he attacked the telegraphic instruments.

A few turns of the thumb screws released the hammers from the sounder and relay and the finger-and-thumb piece from the key, thus rendering the instruments absolutely useless; and then, having waited until Hugh, now bereft of his watch and fearing that he might be late for the meeting, so frightened that he could not have been induced to return to his room had such a thing been possible without a ladder, turned away through the darkness to keep the rendezvous with his associates.

As soon as the boy did turn away, he flung the brass parts of the telegraph instruments over his head above the trees, so that they would strike the ground some distance in advance of where he was walking, knowing that the sound of their fall upon the earth would attract his attention for time sufficient to enable the young detective to drop to the ground outside without being seen.

And that simple feat he accomplished with ease.

The brass pieces had served two purposes. They

had distracted the attention of Hugh, and by their removal from the room, the telegraph instruments were rendered useless until they were found again or until others had been procured.

The night was not cold, and therefore the absence of Hugh Danforth's shoes gave him no inconvenience other than the absurdity of the circumstance of his being in his stocking feet, for he well knew that his friends would ask no end of questions about them, when he arrived at his destination.

Wild horses could not have drawn him back into that terrible room in the darkness.

Too much of the mysterious had happened there before he left it, and now that he was well out of it, and had opportunity for soberer thought, he became frightened from another point of view, for his good sense told him that spirits were not abroad to perform such acts as he had witnessed, or rather felt, and that it could have been accomplished only by human agency.

It followed, therefore, that somebody had been in his room with him.

He paused among the bushes near the gateway to think it over, and thus gave Ten-Ichi an opportunity to roll into a hasty bundle the clothing he had discarded among the lilacs before he entered the house, for he preferred still to maintain his black covering while he pursued Hugh Danforth to the meeting place of The Gentlemen Raiders.

"Gentlemen Raiders, forsooth!" he murmured. "I'll teach these boys a lesson that they won't soon forget, before I am done with them."

Then, suddenly, while he waited, Hugh started away through the night, evidently having decided that he much preferred to face the ridicule of his friends than to return to the house for his shoes.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECRET OF THE OLD WELL.

It is rarely that there is a community among the suburban districts surrounding any large city that has not its deserted mansion.

Usually it is one of the old-time grander sort that

has long since fallen into disuse and therefore into decay and ruin. Usually, also, it belongs to the estate of some suddenly rich person, who having purchased the property upon which it is located, decides that the old house is not good enough for him, and, therefore, builds a new one upon another site.

Such houses as these are all too often the resort of local criminals, or of tramps, or grafters of some sort, who find in its seclusion a fitting abode with accompanying freedom from observation for their uses.

It is an easy matter to darken windows and doors so that no ray of light from the interior can penetrate to the outer world. Such an operation requires merely that the windows be carefully and systematically boarded, and that the boards be in turn covered with several layers of thick black cloth or felt, and if particular care is taken in such preparations, neither light nor sound will penetrate to the outside to warn the uninitiated that the house is tenanted by people who have no right to be there.

It was a place precisely of this description which the "Gentlemen Raiders" had selected for their headquarters, and had it been erected for their purposes alone, it could not have offered better opportunities, nor have been more conveniently located, or more completely isolated from the inspection of chance observers.

The house in question was known as the Magowan mansion, because the Magowan family had been the last people who had occupied it.

But almost a score of years had passed since the house had been lived in, and since that time even the direction of the highway had been changed, so that now it stood nearly half a mile back from the road, and was almost hidden from view by a dense growth of trees that had once formed a pleasant shade around it, but had become with the neglect of years a forest of half-grown trees and undergrowth commingling with the larger specimens so that a person in passing that way would never discover the presence of the mansion at all unless attention was particularly called to it.

In a direct line as the crow flies it was almost two miles from the center of Prothero Park, and in a direc-

tion opposite to that which had been so systematically visited by the burglars.

It was to the Magowan mansion that the footsteps of Hugh Danforth led, and, therefore, to that place where Ten-Ichi followed him.

As soon as they were well among the trees that surrounded it, Ten-Ichi deposited his bundle of clothing in a safe place, where he could quickly find it when wanted, and then, weaponless, of course, and arrayed precisely as he had been while he played the tricks upon Hugh, he glided behind his leader like the shadow he was.

Hugh Danforth approached the house with confidence, and when directly in front of it, and therefore among the densest part of the trees, he made a noise that was so precisely like the chirping of a tree-toad that Ten-Ichi was amazed by the perfection of the imitation.

After delivering the signal he was silent until it was answered, and then he moved forward rapidly, skirting the house, and presently he seemed to drop out of sight, so suddenly did he disappear from view.

When he had gone, Ten-Ichi glided forward to the spot where he had disappeared, and found, much to his surprise, that he was standing on the platform that surrounded an old and apparently long-disused well. An old well-house covered it, and a rope hung from the windlass into the darkness below, just as if a bucket had been lowered and left there.

It was plainly evident to Ten-Ichi that Hugh had gone down that rope, and it was equally certain that he must not attempt to follow until he was sure that he could do so without running the risk of discovery.

To be discovered now, meant the utter spoilation of all his plans, and that while the work he had laid out for the night was less than half consummated.

While he stood there, concealed by the shadows of the trees, wondering what should be his next move, another tree-toad chirped at the front of the house, and he drew farther back, realizing that another one of the "Gentleman Raiders" had arrived and was signaling his approach.

He had not long to wait, for the signal, as before,

was answered, and this time Ten-Ichi succeeded in locating the answering call, for it came, or seemed to come from the cupalo of the house. Moreover, Ten-Ichi thought, the fact that it was replied to much more quickly than had been the case in the first instance, showed that Hugh had been the first arrival and that now the inmates of the house, if there were more than one, were on the watch for the others who were expected.

He watched closely the second form as it appeared out of the darkness and approached the well, and was not surprised to discover, first that it belonged to Roger Cameron, and second that he made no hesitation in seizing upon the rope that dangled in the well and sliding rapidly down it out of sight.

Presently, after that, a third arrival was announced in the same way; then a fourth; then a fifth; then a sixth, a seventh, an eighth and a ninth—and then they ceased to arrive.

"Either that completes the outfit or the others have not been notified, or could not come," Ten-Ichi decided. "And now it would appear as if the time has come for me to attend the meeting also."

For a moment he hesitated between two methods of procedure—that is, whether it would be better for him to descend by the rope in the well, or to attempt to enter the old house by another and safer means; but at last he decided upon following in the tracks of the others.

It was indeed fortunate that he did so, for the man to whom Hugh Danforth in his soliloquy had referred as Capt. Bob was a crafty person in his calling, and he had provided admirably against surprise by connecting every door and window of the old house with a marvelously well-designed alarm which would give instant warning in the room where he and his companions congregated, against any effort to enter the house by any other means than the old well.

However, Ten-Ichi chose the right course, as events proved, and, although he knew that he ran a risk of dropping directly into the arms of one of those who had preceded him, he took the rope in his hands and permitted his body to slide down it.

Hardly had he committed himself to the rope when a tenth chirping of the tree-toad sounded from in front of the house, and he knew that in another moment he would be between two fires—between the coming of the last arrival and the presence of the person who would be sent to give him admittance at the bottom of the well.

It was too late to climb out of the well again, for he knew that he would arrive at the top just in time to meet the newcomer face to face.

There was, therefore, nothing for him to do save to get to the bottom as quickly as possible and to trust to the darkness, his luck, and the black costume that enveloped him, to conceal him from view.

He was halfway down the rope when one of his feet touched against a projection in the wall of the well, and as he slid on past it, he thrust out one hand, only to discover that above the projection there was a deep hole in the wall, and that the projection itself was a board that had evidently been wedged into place in order to afford a foothold for those who might have occasion to descend.

Plainly that black hole was the entrance to an underground entrance to the house; and it was also plain to Ten-Ichi that he must himself hasten to the bottom of the well, and remain there until the momentary danger was past.

Fortunately the well was dry. It was, in fact, nothing more than a heap of rubbish and dried leaves that had collected there, half filling the place, and it was so near to the projection in the wall where the black hole was located that he had to crouch his body in order to prevent his head from reaching above the place where the newcomer's feet must tread.

A better place to observe what was to happen could not have been designed.

He was within a few feet of the entrance hole, so near in fact that he could have reached his arm into it from where he stood, and yet he was thoroughly concealed.

Even while these thoughts passed through his mind, the rope which he had released from his grasp began

o sway, and in another instant the quick breathing of one person in the act of descending reached his ears.

The tenth member of the burglars' gang caught upon the projection with his foot and hung poised there for a moment.

Ten-Ichi could hear him fumbling with his hands along the wall of the well, and, presently, he muttered to himself in a low tone:

"Confound it," he said. "I can never find that easily rock. It's dead against the rules to light a match here, but I've got to do it."

There was a moment of silence and then the sound of the scratching of a match against his clothing.

Ten-Ichi, from below, was watching every move carefully, well knowing that he could not himself be seen, and he saw the match flare up, saw that by its light the boy, who still clung to the rope with one hand, had discovered the thing he searched for, and saw him, as the flame died out, seize upon a pointed stone that projected from the wall beside the hole.

Then all was darkness again.

"Well," thought the young detective, "it is lucky, for all, that I came into the well before this fellow arrived or I might have looked all night for the secret entering the house and then not have discovered it. If it is, I think I will have no difficulty in following him now."

Listening, he heard a low, grating sound, as if some heavy object were pushed aside, and in another instant the rope hung free again.

Then the rumbling sound was repeated, and after a moment all was silence.

Ten-Ichi knew that the last one to arrive at the rendezvous had entered the house by the secret passage, and he was assured that nobody had come to meet him, now he felt that he could proceed on his way without incurring much risk of being intercepted.

It was the work of an instant to mount to the narrow platform beside the hole in the wall which he was so convinced was no hole at all, but merely a foothold cut out of the wall to render the means of entrance to the secret passage more precarious.

The young detective had no means of striking a

light. He was utterly devoid of any implement of any kind. He had only the acute senses which God had given him, to rely upon, but he considered himself well equipped at that. His black suit was worth a dozen guns and a score of lights, to his way of thinking.

Nevertheless, he knew that he would stand but a small chance of escaping from that house with his life, if he should be discovered. Not that he believed that the boys who had been led into such nefarious business would deliberately murder him, but he was certain in his own mind that the Capt. Bob to whom Hugh Danforth had referred was an old offender, and a criminal who would not hesitate to slit a throat if it happened to get between him and his liberty.

He had located the movable stone quite accurately, and he was not a minute in finding it.

He tried pushing upon it, but it remained firmly in its place and refused to move.

Then he tried a side motion, first one way and then the other, and then up and down, but with the same effect.

Finally he pulled upon it, and instantly it left the wall and jutted out into the well, and Ten-Ichi, feeling along behind it, discovered that it was fastened to a stiff iron rod which extended backward through the wall.

At the same instant he again heard the grating noise that he had noticed while he waited at the bottom of the well, and he knew that the aperture was open.

Feeling his way with great care, he stepped through the opening thus made, and, discovering by the touch of his hands that there was a low door which had been made of stones in evident imitation of the wall of the well, he passed beyond it and closed it behind him, satisfied that the single stone and the iron rod on the outside, had been pulled back into place and that he had left the entrance as secure as he had found it.

Then, feeling carefully around him again, he slowly made his way forward along a narrow and low passageway, and in three minutes more he stepped out of the narrow place into what his best judgment told him was the cellar of the house.

In that he was right, as he was presently to discover.

He paused to listen, and even as he did so, he heard the sound of half-suppressed laughter from the room over his head, and he knew that he was about to witness a meeting of the "Gentlemen Raiders" in their Magowan mansion stronghold.

CHAPTER IX.

POSSESSED OF THE DEVIL.

Ten-Ichi experienced no difficulty in finding his way through the interior of the house. It was evident that the occupants were so confident of the adequacy of their defensive arrangements that they believed a guard of any sort other than the bells upon the windows and doors, unnecessary.

At all events no impediment obstructed Ten-Ichi's passage to the main floor of the house, where he speedily discovered that the room which in the palmy days of the mansion had been used as a banqueting hall had been adopted by this gang of gentlemen(?) burglars for their principle uses.

It proved to be especially adapted to the uses of Ten-Ichi also.

It was, in fact, an enormous room, paneled from floor to ceiling and across the ceiling also, in black walnut.

In the center of the room was an old-fashioned dining table, which in the days of entertainment might easily have seated thirty people, and around one end of that massive piece of furniture the eleven inmates of the room were congregated, while in the center of that part of the table that was between them burned a solitary lamp that was almost enveloped in a dark green shade. The other end of the table stretched away into the darkness and gloom of the other end of the room.

No arrangement more perfect for the operations of Ten-Ichi could be imagined.

The dark finishings of the room, the lofty gloom of the place, the single group of persons with the lamp between them, so that they were all facing it, thus con-

fining their realm of vision to the glow of light that was directly upon the table, and placing the other quarters of the room in comparatively black darkness, added to the intentness of the group upon the subject, rendered Ten-Ichi, in his costume of black and with his silent tread, which upon the thick rug that covered the floor gave out absolutely no sound whatever, like a shadow indeed.

Even the door by which he entered the room had not been securely closed, and it gave out no sound when he pushed it open and entered.

He was sure, while he stood there behind them looking upon their meeting and listening to all that was said between them, that if they had turned in a body and studied the corner of the room where he had halted, it would have required a steady effort of a full minute for one of them to have discovered even the outlines of his figure against the black walnut trimmings of the dining hall.

They were all laughing, and, after a fashion, gazing at Hugh Danforth when Ten-Ichi entered, and it was evident that he had been relating his inexplicable experiences in his own house.

While they indulged in an unusually hearty burst of laughter, half suppressed though it was, Ten-Ichi looked around him to take his bearings.

He discovered that very little of the old and massive furniture of the room had been removed at the time the house was deserted by its owners.

The great carved sideboard was there; the massive old sofa, now worn threadbare and without an upholstered spring left in its make-up; many of the huge chairs and several other large pieces of furniture stood against the walls—and not exactly against the walls either, for a narrow seat that had once been bolstered in leather cushions, ran entirely around the room, and the articles of furniture, standing against the seat, left a space between them and the wall which began two feet above the floor and afforded a space about fifteen inches behind them.

"I can play hide-and-seek with them here to beat the band!" mused Ten-Ichi, with a smile.

While the young detective was engaged in study-

these things, those in the room continued to make
rt of Hugh Danforth.

"Upon my word, Hugh," said Roger Cameron, "I
ave you credit of not being afraid of anything. I
suppose you have made up your mind that you were
unted, eh?"

"I don't know, and I don't care what you call it,"
lied Hugh, with some warmth, "the point is that the
ngs I have described happened. I'm not lying to
a. Do you think I would have come all the way
e without my shoes if——"

"If you weren't rattled with fright? No, I do not."
Drop that, Roger," said Hugh, harshly, "or I will
ghty soon show you that I'm not afraid of you,
east."

The man whom Ten-Ichi at once decided was Capt.
b, rapped sharply upon the table with his knuckles.
No more of this," he said, coldly. "If there is any
raveling going on here, I'll take a hand in it myself,
I know what that will mean. I think the whole
g can be explained upon the hypothesis that Hugh
pped asleep while he was waiting for the time to
e to leave the house, and that he dreamed these
e he has told us. That he awoke, frightened and
ped out of the window before he had time to think.

"I'll let it go at that, anyhow. It isn't an unusual
g to have happen. I've had an experience like it
elf, and it's nothing to be ashamed of."

"Yes, I tell you——" began Hugh, when the sharp
ding of Capt. Bob's knuckles interrupted him.

"We'll have no more of this argument," he said.
t settles it. We have a much more important
e to discuss, for, as I understand it, the presence of
e Carter in our midst is no idle jest."

"Let's see how it is," thought Ten-Ichi, with a
le. "I wonder what they would say now if they
that Nick Carter's assistant is listening to every-
and they are saying."

"I have run up against Carter two or three times in
my experience," continued Capt. Bob, "and I am free
to confess that I don't care for another experience."

"Run you in?" asked Hugh.

"Three years once and two the other time," replied
Capt. Bob, grimly.

"Well, he was here, sure enough," said young Came-
ron; "and he said he was coming back."

"If he said he was coming back he'll come back.
You can lay your pile on that proposition," was Capt.
Bob's comment.

"Then what is the best thing for us to do, Bob?"
asked one of the others who had not spoken before.

"There is only one thing for us to do, and that is to
go out of business; quit the game."

"Do you mean that we are to disband altogether?"
asked another, in alarm.

"Certainly not."

"Then what do you mean?"

"I mean that we will adjourn this meeting to-night
for thirty days, that's what I mean. We will each go
our separate ways during that time; I mine, and each
of you yours. Not one of us will come near this place
again till the expiration of that time, and then we will
meet as we have met to-night and decide whether we
can begin operations over again, or if we will have to
wait still longer. And during that thirty days, you
have got to be mighty good boys in your own homes,
too, or that detective will get on to you and your
governors will be down on top of you like a ton of
lead. You see——"

Capt. Bob's remarks ceased abruptly, and he uttered
a yell that would have done credit to a Comanche
Indian. At the same time he leaped from his chair
into the air, and if the table had not been too heavy
for half a dozen men to have lifted, it would have been
overturned by the impact of his body against it.

Uttering fierce curses and growls, he danced up and down on the floor with one hand clasped against his body behind him, while the others also leaped to their feet and stood staring at his antics in amazement.

Ten-Ichi, who had jammed a pin halfway to the head into the soft flesh of the Gentlemen Raiders' captain, glided swiftly backward and lost himself behind one of the pieces of heavy furniture.

Capt. Bob, as soon as he had sufficiently recovered his equanimity, glared around the room and then into the faces of his companions.

"That might have been a rat that bit me," he said, "but I want to say this: If it wasn't a rat, and if any of you fellows think you can play jokes on me, I'll make the one who does it wish that he had never been born."

Every boy in the room disclaimed any and all joking propensity, and gradually they settled down to business again; but it was plain that Capt. Bob had his suspicions that one of the boys had been making game of him; also that he regarded Hugh Danforth and Roger Cameron as the likely ones, and that he regarded the story Hugh had told of his experience as part of a put-up job for that purpose.

"For my part——" began Roger, when he also came to a sudden stop, for he had received a resounding whack against the side of his head which dazed him.

Instantly he leaped to his feet, and, turning to the companion who sat next to him on that side, demanded angrily:

"What in thunder do you mean by hitting me in that manner?"

"Never touched you," replied the boy addressed.

"You're a——"

"Here, there, none of that! Sit down!" ordered Capt. Bob.

"Cooney hit me," said Roger.

"Never touched you. You're dreaming, like Danforth, that's what you are."

"Sit down!" roared Capt. Bob.

Roger complied, but he had scarcely resumed his seat when the chair occupied by Dan Cooney was pulled over backward and Dan himself was hurled violently to the floor.

He bounded to his feet in a rage, and, before any body conjectured his intent, he threw himself with the fury of a tiger-cat upon Roger.

Several of the others sprang forward to separate them, and for a moment the room was in commotion; but it subsided presently, and, obeying a stern order from their captain, each one of the boys took his place standing, before his chair, and with his hands resting upon the table, one hand crossed over the other.

"Now," said Capt. Bob, slowly and impressively, "you are standing in the position in which you took the oath of allegiance to our brotherhood. You all knew that I do not call you into this position unless I am in earnest in what I say. Somebody here is trying to be fresh to-night, and that sort of thing won't come down with me. I won't stand for it, not for a minute! You hear me! When I give the order I want you all to resume your seats and we'll proceed with the business of this meeting, and if there is more of this infernal horse play, two things will happen. Somebody will get hurt, and badly hurt, or my name isn't Capt. Bob, and, moreover, we'll disband this organization not to meet again. Do you all hear me, and do you understand?"

"Yes," they replied, as with one voice.

"Then sit down—and remember."

They did sit down with a vengeance. They were down on the floor—the entire eleven, including Capt. Bob.

The chairs, somehow, had been moved back while they were standing with their hands resting upon the table—moved backward just far enough to be out of their reach when they sought to resume them, and such a chorus of curses and growls, mingled with laughter, as issued from beneath the table had not been heard in that room for many a year.

Meanwhile Ten-Ichi had glided swiftly behind the great sideboard, and beneath the black hood that covered his head and face was grinning broadly.

When Capt. Bob regained his feet he pounded vigorously upon the table with his fists. He felt that his dignity as chief of the organization had been assailed in a manner that could not be overlooked, and he was furiously angry; and while he was pounding and striking at the same time, Ten-Ichi slipped from his place of concealment and flitted, like the shadow he was, beneath the table at the end of it that was farthest from where the group was gathered.

He crept forward silently while Capt. Bob was still talking, and then suddenly, just as the scoundrel was at the most vehement point of his discourse, the young detective seized him by both feet and pulled them from under him with a quick jerk.

At the same instant he turned, and, with lightning-quickness, jabbed the pin he held in his hand into the anatomy of one after another of the boys standing behind the table.

In an instant everything was in the wildest confusion.

Such a chorus of yells as went up from the boys defied description.

The curses and oaths that came from the place where Capt. Bob had been upset, defy reproduction; and then, to cap the climax of it all, the lamp on the table was extinguished, and in its stead a brilliant glow of fire filled the room from a seething mass of flame that came at the center of the table.

And dancing upon the table in the midst of it all was the very devil himself, horns and all, and as red as the color of blood.

CHAPTER X.

THE DANCING SKELETON.

Ten-Ichi was aware that he was undertaking a very great risk in making such an exhibition of his powers, for it was more than likely that every person in that room was armed, and that one or more of them would remember the fact and shoot. Men are apt to forget ordinary measures of caution when they are frightened, and the noise that a pistol might make would not be remembered until after it had been fired.

He was, therefore, thoroughly upon his guard when he donned the red suit over his black one, and otherwise prepared for the great act of the night.

He knew that there would be an interval covering perhaps a minute when everyone of them would forget their weapons in their fright and astonishment, and upon that minute he relied.

When they scrambled to their feet and saw, with horror in their eyes, what appeared to be the Evil One himself playing with the fires of Hades upon the very table around which they had been seated, it was altogether too much for the nerves of most of them.

Several of the boys bolted precipitately for the door, only to find that both doors, which gave admittance and egress to and from the room, were locked, and that the keys had disappeared. The windows, of course, had long ago been boarded up, and so they were one and all prisoners.

Others, who did not leap for the doors, fell prone upon the floor, in paroxysms of terror.

Roger Cameron turned as white as a ghost and promptly fainted away.

Hugh Danforth uttered a yell of terror, and, throwing himself upon the floor, burst into tears.

Dan Cooney dove beneath the table, pulled his coat over his head, and groaned in fright.

Each and everyone of the boys who were present were affected in different ways, but there was no one among them who was not thoroughly terrorized.

Capt. Bob himself was no exception to the rule.

A criminal all his life, he was a victim of the most aggravated form of superstition, and he did not for one instant doubt that it was a real, genuine, original devil that danced on the table in front of him.

Nevertheless, self-preservation is the first law with all his class, and the instinct of it was not lacking in him.

Much can happen in half a minute of time when things are moving swiftly as they were in the dining room of that old house, and for perhaps thirty seconds Capt. Bob was paralyzed with terror.

Then, bethinking himself that he was armed, his hand dropped swiftly to his side; but at the same instant Ten-Ichi leaped into the air.

He sprang directly upon the shoulders of Capt. Bob, and, of course, bore him downward to the floor.

Then, while the man was falling, Ten-Ichi managed to possess himself of the revolver that Capt. Bob had pulled.

He wrenched it free from the criminal's grasp, and—none too gently—rapped him on the head with the butt of it, so that while the doughty captain sank in a heap to the floor under the weight of the young detective, he was also rendered unconscious by the severe blow he received over his temple.

This was precisely what Ten-Ichi desired to accomplish.

He knew that if he could deprive the boys of their leader confusion would reign, and that by taking advantage of this confusion he could accomplish everything he had desired upon since the moment when he

became convinced that the mysterious burglaries in the neighborhood of Prothero Park were committed by the young sons of the most respectable members that community, led by an ex-convict, who had worked upon their love of the romantic to lead them astray.

Ten-Ichi was determined to save those boys, one at all, and also to make such an example of the man who was responsible for the sins they had committed, that they would not soon forget the experience.

The moment he struck Capt. Bob on the head with the butt of the pistol, and while confusion still reigned supreme in the room, Ten-Ichi darted away again into obscurity behind the furniture.

It required only a moment of time for him to get out of the red devil's costume he wore, and to remove one of the remaining pads from beneath his black clothing, where he had concealed it.

He also knew that Capt. Bob would not recover consciousness for some time to come, and that he had ample opportunity for the rest that he wanted to do.

The packet which he now unfolded was enveloped in oiled silk, but was made of the same thin Japanese material as the others.

More than that, while he was putting it on behind the great walnut sideboard, there were places on the wall where it glowed like fire behind his screen.

As a matter of fact, it was also black, but transparent upon it was a perfect representation of a skeleton, with a phosphorescent substance that made the ribs and skull, and the bones generally stand out with ghastly reality.

While he worked he could hear some of the boys sobbing as if their hearts were breaking, others trying vainly to escape by way of the door, only to find that escape was utterly impossible; others tackled the detective, only to discover that their efforts were futile; others called vainly for Capt. Bob, who, of course, did not answer.

And then, horror of horrors; another figure appeared upon the table, and this time, as if to add to the awful terrors of the moment, it was a dancing, gibbering skeleton, and from its bones little flames of pale-blue seemed to dart hither and thither.

Then, while Ten-Ichi danced, he began to chant, and as he chanted, he called one by one, the name of every boy in that room, for he had learned them all while he listened to them before he began their hour of terror.

"You have sent for me and I have come to you," he chanted. "Out of the terrors of the lurid fires of Hades I have come to you. I have come here to claim your souls and to take you with me into the regions of hell. I will strip your breast over your hearts, and I will cut a gash there. From the blood of each one of you that flows from the region nearest your hearts, I will make you sign your names to my scroll in your own blood. Then you will belong truly to me. When you die I will come to claim you, and then when I roast you in the fires that burn forever, I will dance around you and laugh at you. And I will tell you how you have made your fathers, and mothers, and sisters suffer, and you will laugh with me, knowing that you are worthy of the fires of hell because you have made those who love you suffer tortures that are worse than hell."

And so he chanted on for many minutes, depicting every crime they had committed in such a manner that they saw the utmost horror of their sins, and so that they understood, as they never had before, the effect of the wrongs they had done.

Human nature—that is, boy human nature that has not yet reached the age of twenty, could not endure that sort of thing for long, and there was not a boy there who was really bad, just as there was not one who was not brought face to face with the consequences of his acts in a manner that could not have been accomplished in any other way.

While Ten-Ichi danced and chanted they cried and moaned.

They had even ceased to call for Capt. Bob.

Then what appeared to them to be a horrible thing happened before their eyes.

The skeleton began to disappear.

First the skull went out of sight.

That was followed by the ribs and arms while the legs still dangled before them, supporting nothing; and then the leg-bones also vanished.

Ten-Ichi was simply peeling off the skeleton costume and returning it to its oiled silk envelope, and as that left him in black and, therefore, invisible to them, they could see nothing but the operation as it progressed.

Then, from a corner of one of the little packets, Ten-Ichi took a small package.

It contained a small quantity of the famous Japanese polpa powder, which produces instant unconsciousness upon all who breathe it unless the nostrils and the mouth are protected by a piece of linen or silk, through which it will not sift.

Having bound a black silk handkerchief over his black hood to tighten it, Ten-Ichi threw the package against the ceiling with a force that burst it, and then he waited.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

When the ten boys, who completed the membership of that organization known as the "Gentlemen Raiders," opened their eyes, the boards had been removed from the windows of the great dining room, and daylight was streaming in upon them.

It was a most remarkable spectacle, too, that their wakening senses witnessed, for they were one and all seated in the same chairs they had occupied during their meeting, and they were grouped around the table

in precisely the same relative positions they had occupied when the manifestations of the devil first began.

There was only one noticeable absentee, and that was Capt. Bob. He was nowhere to be seen.

But there was another astounding fact connected with their waking, and that was that each one of them was tied firmly in his chair so that there was no possibility of leaving it.

Their ankles were tied together and drawn back under the chairs; their elbows were pinioned behind them; a rope encircled each neck and was from thence passed around the chairs; other ropes were around their bodies, and so securely fastened were they that not one of them was able to alter his position.

Then, while they gazed in consternation into each other's faces, the door opened, and an Italian laborer appeared before them.

He advanced to the place that had been occupied by Capt. Bob, and for a full minute stood there, looking into the faces of one after another of the captives, now thoroughly cowed.

"Me founda you here," he said, presently. "Me taked the man you call El Capitan Bob away. Him is in prison fora murd. Him a bad man. Him nama is Bob Slayton. Him killa him wife last year, in Nova Yorka. Him go to the chair, anda pish! him die lika the dog he is. Now, boys, you watcha me."

In a twinkling Ten-Ichi, for it was he, tore off his wig, and his coat and vest. Then bit by bit he altered his disguise before their eyes until he stood before them exactly as Roger and Hugh had seen him the evening before—in the guise of the book agent.

"Two of you know me," he said. "The rest of you heard of me. Now I have something to tell you. In the next room, or what was once the parlor of this house, are your fathers. The father of everyone of you is there waiting to liberate you one by one. They have called on your fathers, and they are ready to hear

your confessions, one by one. In making those confessions, let me advise you not to place any blame upon one another. Take all the blame for your own misdeeds to yourselves, personally. If you are truly penitent, your fathers are prepared to forgive you. I have their promises for that. When you have passed through this ordeal, let me advise that you reorganize your society, and that you drop the last name of it. Let your association henceforth be called the 'Independent Order of Young Gentlemen.' Make your rules strict, and see to it that you live up to them. Be as firm in your friendships for the sake of good as you were for the doing of evil. Roger Cameron, I will take you to the next room first; after that I will take the others, one by one.

"Remember, if your fathers and mothers forgive you, God will do the same."

"Are you Nick Carter?" asked Roger, with a sob.

"No. I am only one of his assistants; but he is in the other room with your fathers, waiting for you. Nick Carter loves boys, and he wants all boys to become good and splendid men. If you have any things to give, bestow them upon him when you go into the other room."

THE END.

The next issue of the new series of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 379, will be entitled "The Mystery of the Mikado; or, Nick Carter in Japan," and will be one of the most thrilling and interesting of all the late stories about the great detective, who is known to many of our readers by the sobriquet of The Little Giant. The story will relate the secret of Ten-Ichi's mission to this country, which was to secure the services of the detective for the Emperor of Japan, to engage him to go there to perform a great task for that far-distant government. Do not fail to read it.

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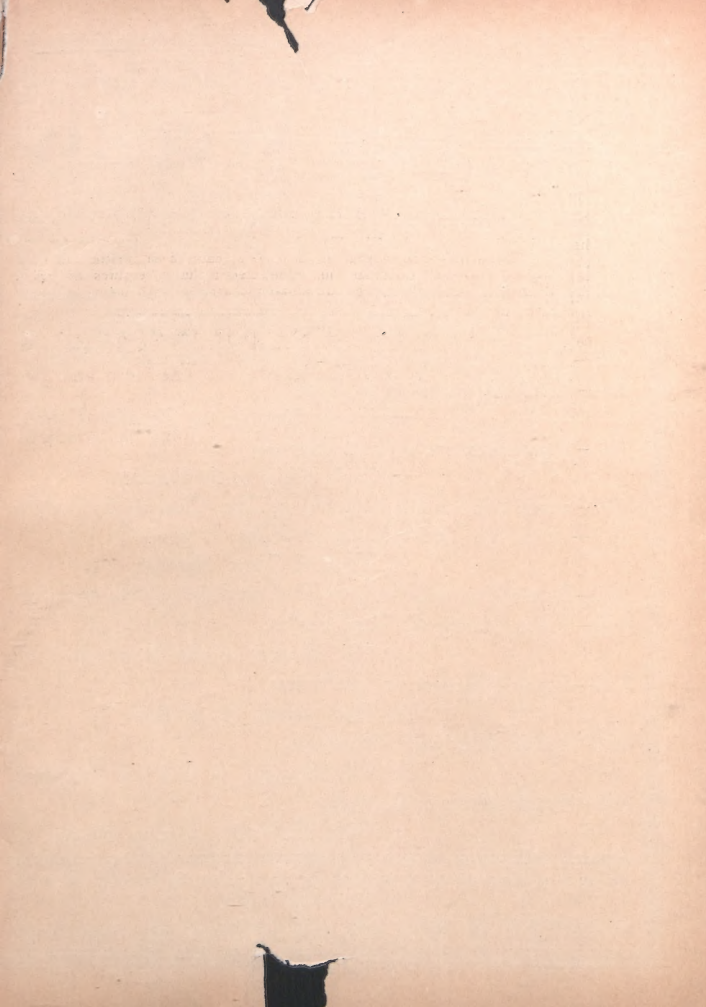
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